



---

*Advocating for Life, Faith, and Freedom in the Public Square*

To: Members of the General Government Budget Committee  
From: Chris Long, President Ohio Christian Alliance  
Re: Interested Party Testimony on H.B. 218

I would like to thank Chairman Peterson, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate General Government Budget Committee for hearing our testimony today on H.B. 218. The legislation that you are considering today is in some ways too late to help the thousands of Ohioans who have already lost their jobs or have been displaced from their jobs that they loved and to which they were dedicated, simply because their right to choose their own health decision as to whether or not to take the COVID -19 vaccine jeopardized their employment.

Legislation that expands exemptions from the COVID-19 vaccine in Ohio should have been passed months ago. Unfortunately, competing and conflicting interests caused the legislation to stall, and as a result Ohioans suffered real loss and personal damage. Many of them cannot take the vaccine for health reasons, religious conscience, or for personal reasons. When mandates were first announced earlier this year by a number of Ohio hospitals and health care systems, thousands of health care workers found themselves in a no-win situation – take the vaccine or lose your job. These same health care workers were our front-line heroes in the face of the pandemic when there was no vaccine, yet they went to work every day helping others at risk to themselves. Many of them actually contracted COVID and recovered and have natural immunity. They have their reasons for why they are not taking the experimental COVID-19 vaccine. Yet, their employers were forcing the issue. We were faced with this in our own family. The only option was a medical or religious exemption.

In 20 years of public policy and faith advocacy, our organization has not had much experience with religious exemptions. I can speak to you now from personal experience, as we have a working knowledge of it now. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states the following, "It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer ... to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." Once it was understood what was required to file a religious exemption, we began to share information that was helpful to other Ohioans who were faced with the same dilemma. OCA also used the services of Liberty Counsel, a national law group that represents people of faith who face discrimination. Over the last four months we have

been able to help thousands of Ohioans file for a religious exemption from the COVID-19 vaccine. We held public meetings across the state. People who came to these meetings were hard-working Ohioans who worked in the health care industry, power companies, the airline industry, manufacturing, and government agencies.

What we learned from talking to these workers is that it was not just the health care workers facing the vaccine mandate, but employees of companies who had contracts or obligation to the federal government that were now facing threat from the Biden administration that they would lose their federal contracts if they did not enforce the vaccine mandate. President Biden made that clear when he stated that his Administration had run out of patience and that they were going to force the vaccine mandate on companies with 100 employees or more, or any company that had contracts with the federal government.

The states, including Ohio, began to fight back against this Federal overreach. Ohio's Attorney General Dave Yost filed three lawsuits. The first challenged The Biden Administration's vaccine mandate for private-sector employees. The second lawsuit challenged the Biden Administration's vaccine mandate for federal contractors, and then the Ohio Attorney General joined the lawsuit that made national news last Wednesday in the Western District of Louisiana federal court against the Biden Administration CMS order. The judge ordered a national stay on the order. As a result of the federal court's national stay on the CMS order, Some Ohio hospitals have already put a hold on their vaccine mandates. Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals announced that they are putting a hold on the vaccine mandate in response to the federal court's order. Some health care groups in Ohio took the opportunity to inform their employees that it was never their intention to issue a mandate, but they were being pressured by the Biden Administration CMS order that if they didn't issue a vaccine mandate, they would lose their Medicare and Medicaid dollars.

It is up to this committee to review the legislation that is before you and to consider how it would best serve the people of Ohio going forward, saving jobs of hard-working Ohioans. Though the hour is late for this legislative body to act, the courts have actually granted you an opportunity to enact legislation that would expand exemptions, securing the personal rights and health care decisions of Ohioans concerning vaccine mandates. This committee may take this opportunity to look at what has been passed in Florida that expanded exemptions to include, but are not limited to, health or religious concerns; pregnancy or anticipated future pregnancy; and past recovery from COVID-19. Also in Florida, employees can choose to opt for periodic testing or PPE as an exemption, and employers must cover the costs of testing and PPE exemptions for employees.

I would like to thank Chairman Peterson and the members of the General Government Budget Committee for the opportunity to present testimony and for exercising the proper process by which meaningful legislation should be considered.

I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee might have at this time.